

INTRODUCTION

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That the separateness of yeomanry and elite had visible and socio-logically important expression in physical type in Haiti was a clear consequence of the history of that country. But the traditional preponderant light skins at the top of the structure and the preponderant darkness at its base are less important than the domination of the total structure, and of the institutional means for changing it, by a mere fraction of the national population. It is the power of the elite which has mattered through time; its physical appearance has been only a historically derived expression of that power. Such a balance of politically weak masses against numerically sparse power holders is common, perhaps particularly in the "less developed world", but each such case has certain special characteristics. Haiti's special nature is not simply in its being a yeoman country, and one in which a small group dominates the mass. As a rural, agrarian, unindustrialized, politically sovereign, and quasi-capitalistic country, Haiti shares much with other lands; but in each regard its own particularity needs to be assessed.

The rurality of Haiti is extreme, not simply because there are no concentrations of population in excess of 25,000 except for Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien but also because towns of intermediate size are few in number, and the urban concentrations in the country's two cities are substantially of relatively recent rural origin. Port-au-Prince dominates the Republic in all of its economic, political, and social activities. Furthermore, the rural towns have been losing to the capital, not gaining from it. Until the United States occupation, the larger towns of the coast, such as Jérémie, Jacmel, and St. Marc, were united economically with each other, and to some extent with the capital, by a lively coastwise shipping system, and the inland towns were tributary to those of the coast. The growth of inland transport during the occupation strengthened the interior towns while coastwise shipping declined, but the capital grew even more important as the sole economic center of the Republic. Since the 1940s, the rapid deterioration of the road system has left both inland and coastal towns enfeebled; only Port-au-Prince has remained strong.

The dominion of Port-au-Prince is firm, and there is no focus of power in the countryside that can counteract it. Those few foreign enterprises in Haiti that base themselves outside the capital city use local port facilities (e.g. Miragoâne for Reynolds Aluminum, Cap-Haïtien for the sisal plantations of the north) and do not affect the development of the interior transport.

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COMMERCE

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policy of encouraging trade with his friends and prohibiting it with his enemies—both arbitrarily. The variation of Pétion was a sort of mercantilism, with set high tariffs.

What Dessalines planned was in terms of Western statecraft so weird that white onlookers felt they were restrained in calling Dessalines a transplanted African tribal chieftain. So passionately intense was the fury of that general against all whites that he took every precaution he could devise to prevent face-to-face dealings between his Haitians and foreigners. By deceit, treachery, and ingenious cruelty he conducted a massacre which deserves comparison with that of Saint Bartholomew: this effectively rid the country of white residents. Since for a time Haiti would have to depend for economic survival upon trade with foreigners, Dessalines next conceived a project whereby the whole population would be gathered in the centre of the island, in the most protected valleys and the gorges of the highest mountains. In these fastnesses the people would never see a white but would work on the land, producing sugar and coffee and cotton for export without ever leaving their local habitations. On the seacoast would be established certain "counters" over which a few incorruptible Haitians, chosen by the Emperor himself, would sell local products and buy the necessary imported goods. Impregnable fortresses were to guard access to the interior, which would be reached by new roads from the seacoast "counters." Every seaport was to be destroyed as soon as new towns could be built in the back country. Already when his death intervened Dessalines had moved his capital from the Cape (that is, Cap-Haïtien, formerly Cap Français) to the inland village of Marchand (in the department of the Artibonite; now renamed Dessalines), and his next plan was to transfer Port-au-Prince eight leagues inland to the plantation Dérance, among the mountains.

Dessalines has been thought absurd, childish, barbaric. But there is something poignant, even tragic, in this fiery determination of the black chieftain, bitter over the cruelties and indignity to which his people had been subject for decades, to use this alien island as best he could and preserve his people at any cost from such another domination.

Despite his scheme for ultimate isolation of the people, Dessalines kept everyone steadily at work by the forced-labor system instituted

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THE HAITIAN PEOPLE

175 finally the license was obtained, it authorized the foreigner to carry
 439 on only a wholesale business—not with other foreign traders or with
 656 any resident aliens, but with Haitians in the six open ports.¹⁰ The
 444 minimum of goods to be sold in any deal was fixed, so that no
 foreigner could inadvertently enter the retail business. Such licenses
 cost between \$1,600 and \$2,000, sums so large that few foreigners
 were drawn to the island.

Quite obviously the government sought to keep the external trade
 of Haiti under its control; it is equally obvious that under the li-
 censing system, with its high fees and strict surveillance, only a small
 number of dealers were attracted, who consequently monopolized
 what little trade there was. Retail business being prohibited to them,
 their imports had to be sold by Haitians.

175 Not even this necessity created a middle class in the country, for
 565 the purchasing power of the peasants and other lower-caste Haitians
 434 was small; also the total sum of imports and exports was not large
 443 enough to support a middle class. The retail trade was chiefly in the
 441 hands of town women. These *marchandes*, as they were called, em-
 ployed a number of hucksters—likewise women—to traverse the
 countryside surrounding the open ports, attend the markets, and
 report either every evening, or every week or month, depending
 upon their findings. The white man let his *marchande* know how
 much coffee he required, and this information was passed on to the
 local speculator who, at a very moderate profit, collected the coffee
 beans from the peasants in his neighborhood. Imports were dis-
 tributed in like manner over the countryside. In its small way this
 system worked well enough, for the good faith of respectable
marchandes could be counted upon both by the white trader and by
 the local dealers. A few European and American traders found it
 profitable to set up as *marchandes* the women with whom they
 cohabited, for this arrangement brought them nearer to the retail
 trade.

175 During Boyer's long administration the staple export was coffee,
 439 still cultivated on a few remaining plantations but mostly picked
 24 from plants growing wild, and sold by the peasants as their one
 source of money income. Sugar disappeared almost wholly from the

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10. Namely, Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haitien, Gonaïves, Jacmel, Les Cayes, and Jérémie; from 1822 to 1844 there were also two open ports in the Spanish part of the island which, during those years, was a part of Haiti.